VISIT…

THE SECRET OF THE WINDSWEPT WALL

A short adventure for four 2nd- to 4th-level player characters

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d20 system

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INTRODUCTION

Sionaas, a powerful wizard, began construction of a tower and dungeon in the nearby mountain range, the Windswept Wall. He recruits a large number of villagers for labor from Poisson, the nearest point of civilization in the area. He pays well and treats them kindly. Two days ago, something terrible happened at the site and a messenger went to Poisson with a note:

"Workers trapped in cave-in — send help."

PREPARATION

You, the Dungeon Master (DM), need a copy of the *Player's Handbook*, the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*, and the *Monster Manual* to use this adventure.

Text that appears in shaded boxes is player information, which you may read aloud or paraphrase when appropriate. Unshaded boxes contain important information for you, including special instructions. Monster and NPC statistics are provided with each encounter in full.

This adventure uses two maps from the "Map-a-Week" feature from the Wizards of the Coast website. The Hidden Coast map is available for available for download at <http://www.wizards.com/dnd/images/mapofweek/1HiddenCoast.jpg> and the Village of Poisson map is available for available at <http://www.wizards.com/dnd/images/mapofweek/4VillagePoisson.jpg>. These maps are reprinted here for your convenience.

BACKGROUND

The village of Poisson, a fortified village at the highest point on the Hidden Coast, buzzes with the news that Sionaas, a powerful human wizard, started constructing a tower and perhaps a dungeon somewhere in the Windswept Wall mountain range near Holden's Wood. Sionaas recruits labor from the village with the promise of generous wages and a short stay in the mountains, and many have taken the offer.

Poisson's mayor, Beorn Lammond, lives in the fortress that dominates the village. With the flow of people out of the village, he worries that the volunteers he counts on to defend the village from pirates and other possible threats won't be available while they're in the Windswept Wall. The garrison of troops billeted here can defend the fortress but nothing else. Should something terrible happen, the village outside the central fortress is vulnerable to any large-scale attack.

CHARACTER HOOKS

There are a variety of ways to introduce the PCs into this adventure:

- The heroes could be travelling up the Free Trail en route to a city or other point of interest when news of the cave-in reaches them.
- The cry for help could be addressed specifically to the PCs, if they have a reputation in the area.
- Beorn or other villager knows the PCs. The PCs could be visiting for some reason.
- Beorn asks the PCs for help knowing their reputation as willing to help those in need.
- If the PCs associate with a government, merchant house, guild, or other organization, it might have sent the PCs to investigate. Their mission is to learn how powerful Sionaas really is and whether he will destabilize the balance of power in the region. The PCs could also be called upon to infiltrate the wizard's complex and construct a secret door unknown to the wizard or to gather information on the structure's defenses, contents, or both.
- Rumors say the Windswept Wall holds riches and the PCs could venture there on their own, searching for treasure by chasing a legend or other.

GATHER INFORMATION OR BARDIC KNOWLEDGE CHECKS

By spending some time in the village of Poisson or talking with farmers in the area, the PCs may hear the following, based on their Gather Information or Bardic Knowledge checks.

DC: Information Gained.

10: Sionaas seeks manual laborers for a project in the Windswept Wall mountain range. Pay is good, length of work is one moon or less. All trades needed.

15: Sionaas treats his workers well and seems honest in his dealings. He's the classic absent-minded wizard though. It probably wouldn't occur to him to swindle anyone, and he doesn't have a familiar. It seems he's using labor from the village of Poisson as a gesture of goodwill since he is a new resident of the area.

20: The village of Poisson can ill-afford the drain on resources the wizard has created and the cave-in has only made it worse. If the villagers at the Windswept Wall are dead or maimed, the village cannot defend itself and word will surely spread to the pirates in the coastal islands or to the monsters in Drake Wood. There are rumblings that the wizard might have done the cave-in on purpose, to weaken Poisson for takeover by the wizard or some ally. Most fear that pirates wait to descend upon the village.

25: Sionaas finished building the aboveground part of his complex and secured it against intrusion by people on-site. The laborers now concentrate just on the belowground features, namely, the dungeon.

30: Sionaas lived in the Hidden Coast for many years, but never in one place for very long. He supports himself as an alchemist and as a fence for stolen property. As a fence, he's particularly interested in any antique maps of the Windswept Wall. Despite pressure to do so, he has never formally aligned himself with any criminal organization. The cave-in could be sabotage from a scorned thieves' guild or merchant house.

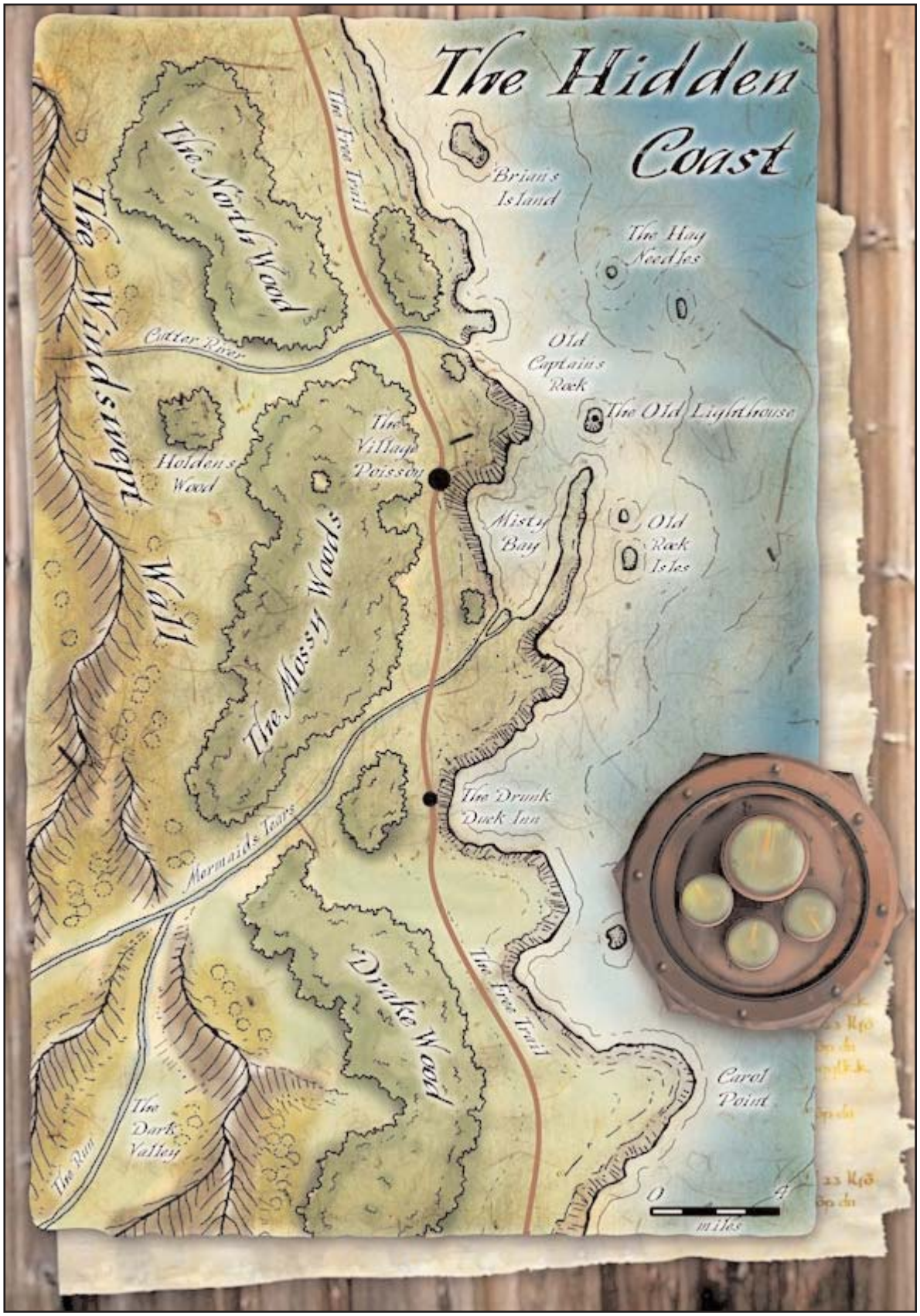
35: A conversation with a local fence discusses various characteristics of Sionaas and also brings up the name Tilloch. That name reminds you of a conversation you overheard two years ago. You were in a busy tavern when you overheard a mumbled rant by a man named Tilloch. He griped about his former beloved, named Sionaas. Tilloch said that the wizard was obsessed with the Windswept Wall and this quest which demanded too much of Sionaas's attention for them to maintain a relationship. He also said that Sionaas sought something in particular in the mountain range but Tilloch didn't know what it was.

ABOUT THE AREA

The following features are described to give a sense of place for the PCs should they explore the area themselves or ask a local about it. DMs can also use the background information to make new adventures based off this one.

The Hidden Coast

The heavy fog that frequently shrouds the coast for miles in both directions of the cliffs underneath Poisson gives this area its name. Legends about the source of the fog run through many generations in the area but most of them revolve around a fire-breathing dragon sleeping in a hidden cave nestled in one of the


The Hidden Coast
The North Wood
The Free Trail
Brian's Island
The Hay Needles
Cutter River
Old Captains Rock
The Old Lighthouse
The Windswept Wall
Holden's Wood
The Village Poisson
The Mossy Woods
Misty Bay
Old Rock Isles
The Drunk Duck Inn
Mermaids Tears
Drake Wood
The Free Trail
Carol Point
The Dark Valley
The Run
0
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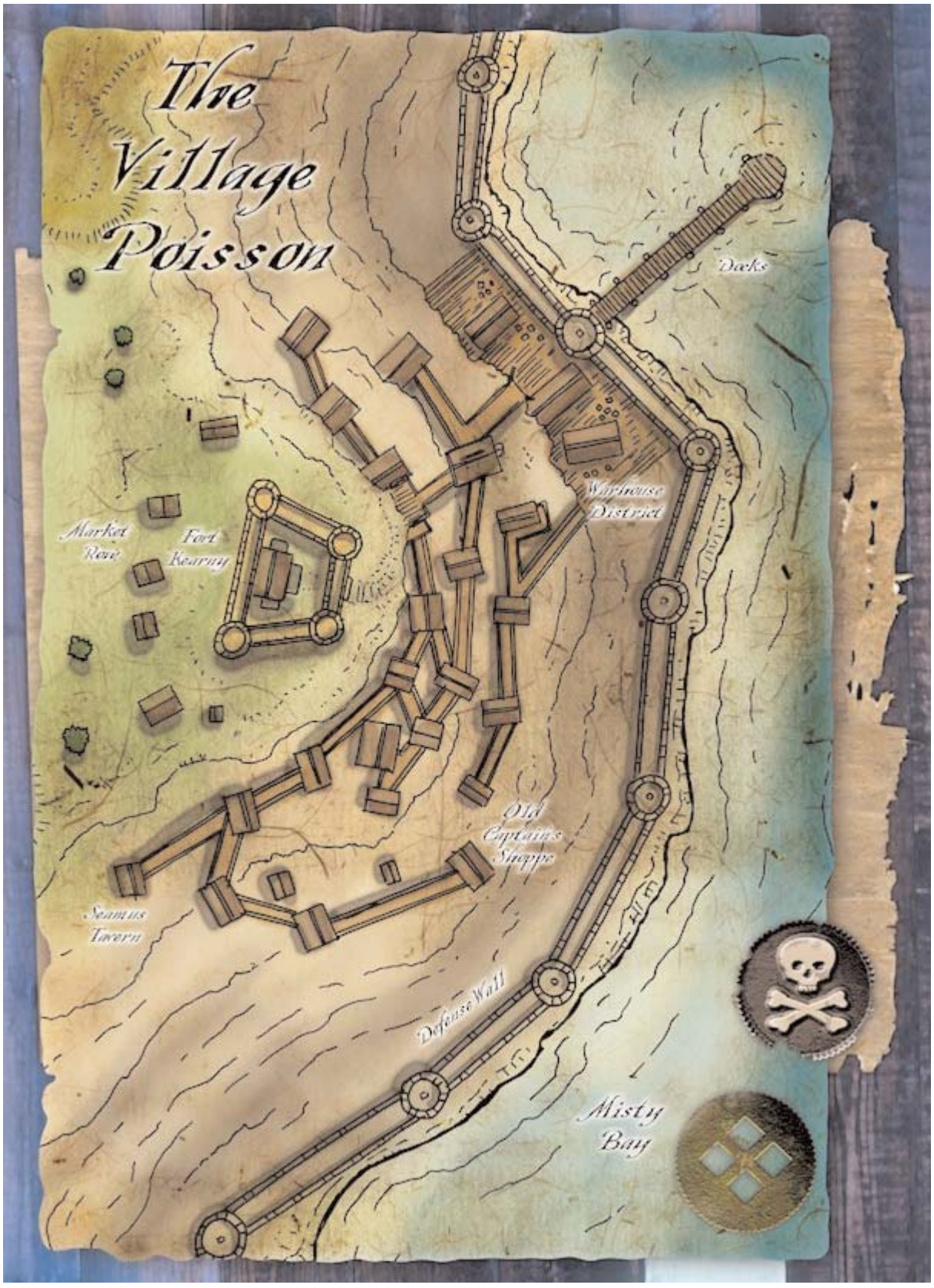
The Village Poisson
Docks
Warehouse District
Market Row
Fort Kearny
Old Captain's Shoppe
Seamus Tavern
Defense Wall
Misty Bay

cliff faces. Allegedly, each night, the dragon's smoldering nostrils produce a fog that grows thick by morning. Many ships crash along the coast because of the fog. The most famous wreck was the ship that became the Drunk Duck Inn, located a day's travel by horse south of Poisson on the Free Trail.

Old Rock and Hag Needles Isles

These islands are favorite locations for pirate bases and constantly change hands depending on which pirate organization is the toughest in the area. Poisson's location high on a cliff helps defend it, but only since Poisson became fortified have assaults on the village have reduced dramatically. Raids now prey on shipping. Rumors abound of long forgotten pirate hoards hidden on the isles and how the isles were once home to a cult that worshipped a dead god eons before any human set foot in the area.

Brian's Island

A swindler sold a large hunk of barren rock to a gullible noble named Brian. Since then, "a Brian's deal" became the area's expression for any sort of unfair business arrangement or deception.

Poisson Village

There used to be a village at the mouth of the Mermaid's Tears River, but it was raided so often by pirates that the villagers moved up the coast to the cliffs. The new settlement became known as Poisson's Village, named after the captain of the garrison that constructed the village's first fortress. Since the fortress's construction a decade ago, pirate activity on land decreased and the Free Trail within a day of Poisson is generally safe.

The Dark Valley

Monsters abound in this valley but they seem to keep to themselves for the most part. River traffic on the Mermaid's Tears is sometimes harassed, and no one dares take The Run, but civilized folk stay away from the valley anyway.

The Mossy Woods

Cleared of the toughest monsters by the garrison in Poisson, the Mossy Woods is safe enough to serve as the village's source of wood and game. About a dozen permanent settlements (farms and the like) exist in the woods. The farmers in the woods are great sources of information about the area outside of Poisson.

Holden's Wood

In the past, an ogre clan wrought havoc from these woods. The woods are named Holden in memory of the great hero who defeated them. A small stone obelisk commemorates Holden's victory. Rumors say a surviving lover of Holden enchanted the obelisk somehow. No one knows what the enchantment is and there is plenty of speculation. Some folk say that on certain nights of the year, when the stars are right, the lovers visit the obelisk and the two are reunited for the night. The area doesn't have any permanent settlements.

The North Wood

A small organization of elves claim these woods; their claim goes unchallenged by Poisson. The elves trade with Poisson routinely and the relationship between the villagers and the elves is good. However, the elven family is still quite secretive about personal matters and individuals are careful not to discuss anything about the wood's defenses. The elves somehow closely allied with a clan of gnomes on the Windswept Wall, though no one in the village is certain what their relationship is.

SIONAAS'S BACKGROUND

The wizard seeks a powerful artifact he knows is buried in the Windswept Wall — specifically underneath the complex he has just built. The dungeon and aboveground structures are mostly a front to allow the wizard to conduct an extensive excavation without using magic.

The artifact he seeks is a unique crystal ball that was used by Koral Liernan, a wizard specializing in planar magic and travel. She traveled extensively to other planes and she crafted a potent crystal ball that allows the user to view locations and people on other planes and even if the viewer has never been on the plane before.

Sionaas plans to use the crystal ball to discover the secret cache that Koral is supposed to have left before her death. The cache supposedly contains a spellbook containing magics that have never been used on Sionaas's plane before as well as planar objects that are uniquely powerful — perhaps almost as powerful as artifacts.

Sionaas cannot resist the lure of this treasure. The cache could be on any plane in the multiverse — only Sionaas's knowledge of Koral and her crystal ball gives any chance of finding it.

Through careful research, Sionaas discovered that the ball somehow was teleported into solid rock, somewhere deep inside a mountain in the Windswept Wall. Sionaas theorizes that Koral did it to prevent anyone from finding her treasure trove. Naturally, this only encourages Sionaas to find it. His research narrowed his search to a specific mountain in the range, but can't generate a more specific location.

Sionaas needs laborers because the ball has to be uncovered conventionally. Sionaas is convinced that Koral enchanted the ball to teleport again if magic moves it or locates it— including using excavation spells or even summoned creatures or constructs to disturb any earth near it. The use of magic must be avoided.

So, finding it must be done using manual labor — the hard way.

THE OFFER

When the villagers from Poisson arrived at the site, Sionaas greeted them. He said that they were indeed there to help him build a tower adjoining his modest stone house — but that for those willing to take the risk, he could offer more gold: They could help him do some major excavation for an underground complex. It would be backbreaking and dangerous — but their purses would be heavier at the end of the day.

A majority of them agreed. As the remaining villagers shored up a trench wall with stones, the wall collapsed, trapping about a dozen people. About a dozen more were outside the trench when it collapsed.

Sionaas could have prevented the accident or used magic to rescue them, but his fear of losing the crystal ball kept him from doing so.

ARRIVAL

When the PCs reach the site, read or paraphrase the following:

> The tower can be seen from a distance, making locating the site easy. The sounds of picks and shovels grate against stone and people shouting carry in the mountains.
>
> About a dozen humans dig frantically at what looks to be a trench that has been filled in with loose stone rocks and earth. They're working with picks and shovels and carrying rocks away one by one. The progress has been slow; about 100 stones have been shifted.
>
> Standing over the scene is an unimposing human clutching a large cloak about him and leaning against a long, thin quarterstaff. The weather is clear and warm, but he looks as though he's standing in a cold rain. He notices your arrival with only a quick, blank glance. A red-haired boy, helping move stones, notices your arrival too and runs up to you.

The boy greets the PCs, giving the name Orwyn. His first question is whether the PCs are the rescuers sent from Poisson. If the PCs say yes, he's very relieved. If not, he pleads with them to help dig out the villagers but implores: "no magic!"

Sionaas sees the collapse as a major setback and wonders how it will affect his retrieval. If there aren't enough people, finding the crystal ball will take forever. If the PCs approach him, he's cordial, though terse. He says that he'll reward the PCs for rescuing the villagers — so long as they don't use any magic to move the earth. He says that the ground is enchanted to prevent movement of earth by magical means and that the villagers have to be dug out by hand. He also bans using summoned or constructed creatures to perform the digging.

How the PCs help the villagers is largely up to them. All the tools common to a construction site are here. Sionaas will say that he is of no particular help to the PCs, since all he can do he has already done — he can only watch and hope.

SURVIVORS (EL 1)

After 1d4 hours of assistance by the PCs, a survivor is located. Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

> Suddenly, a rotund villager with a bellowing voice shouts: "I have one!" At once, other villagers crowd the scene as the portly fellow pulls a dirt-covered lad by the arm out of the earth.

The lad is Eli Placan, a farmer from the Mossy Woods. He is alive, but he also bears some unusual injuries below his waist. A successful Heal check (DC 15) reveals that some of his lacerations, particularly around the ankles and feet, are not from jagged stones but from cuts and bites from a creature, a tiny one with a very small bite radius, no wider than a human's little finger. If the PCs don't take a close interest in Eli, have them make Spot checks (DC 10) to notice that his clothes are

in good shape — except for down around his calves, where they are almost torn off and he seems to have more blood there than anywhere else.

The villagers cheer Eli's survival, and it encourages them to dig harder. They give him a waterskin then leave Eli's care in the PCs' hands so they can concentrate on digging more people out.

If the PCs question Eli about what happened, he'll relate the following:

> "I was helping Clem fill a basket with rocks to be hauled out when there was a rumbling. We looked up just in time to see the whole wall start coming down on us. I wanted to run but I panicked and just froze where I was. A stone knocked me out, I figure. When I came to, I felt pressure all around me and it was dark. I could barely breathe and my head hurt.
>
> "Then things got worse. I heard this skittering and suddenly I felt something eating my feet! I couldn't do anything about it — I couldn't move and I was afraid to scream 'cause I'd swallow more dirt if I opened my mouth, so I just laid there and tried to kick them away.
>
> "I say 'them' 'cause I heard lots of skittering and felt lots of bites on my legs. They felt like the worst bee stings only worse than that!
>
> "They nibbled on me for awhile then went on. I'm lucky they didn't chew my legs clean off!

Eli Placan: Com1, hp2.

At the end of his tale, he'll shudder and drink heavily from the waterskin he was given upon his rescue. Other than the information he just gave, he hasn't anything more to offer about his experience. He doesn't know what the creatures were or where they came from, or how they were able to burrow to him and why they didn't come skittering out when he was unearthed.

THE DIGGING

After the elation of finding Eli wears off, the villagers settle in to a slow routine of digging in shifts. Eventually, the bodies of remaining villagers will be found. All of them show significant wounds to the extremities, including the head. They've all been partially eaten. A Heal check (DC 20) will show that most of the villagers were buried alive (a few died from being crushed by stones) but were then killed by whatever ate them.

SEARCHING FOR CLUES

If the PCs investigate where Eli was found to find out why he wasn't killed like the others, they'll find it a bit difficult. Much of the site was too disturbed by the rescuers' digging to preserve any tracks or to say what collapsed the wall.

However, a successful Search check (DC 20) reveals that there are very small burrow holes near where the other bodies were found. The most holes are found nearest where the most chewed-on bodies were recovered. Eli's area has only a couple such holes. The reason he survived, it seems, is that he was farthest from the creatures.

INDIGENOUS?

None of the villagers have been this high up in the Windswept Wall before, so none of them can say whether the creatures that ate their comrades are native to the area. Sionaas hasn't encountered them either.

FOLLOWING THE HOLE

If a PC has tracking, a successful Wilderness Lore check (DC 15) or else a successful Search check (DC 15) reveals a general direction from which the creatures must have come — below, deeper within the mountain. If the PCs wish to follow, they'll have to dig their way down as the holes are only a couple of inches in diameter at the largest. The villagers won't help the PCs dig because they're too tired from recovering their friends and their only interest now is getting off the mountain, returning to Poisson, and burying the dead. Sionaas will render whatever assistance he can, as he wants to remove any future threat from the area and hopes to convince future laborers to come to the site.

UNDERTRACKS

After 1d6 hours of digging by four people (1d4 hours if by five or more), a small chamber is uncovered. It's two feet in diameter and leads further down into the mountain. Track (Wilderness Lore check [DC 15]) reveals that the hole was made by a Medium-sized burrowing creature that stopped, and then other smaller burrowing creatures left from that point. The larger burrowing creature apparently returned the way it came.

UNDERTRUTH

What happened is that the mother of the ankle biters that killed the villagers, used her tremorsense to "see" the villagers, burrowed to this point then encouraged her young to feed on the trapped people. After the young had their fill, they returned to their mother, climbing back into her mouth, and returned to their home, a cavern about 40 feet away.

PURSUIT (EL 3)

If the PCs follow the hole leading to the cavern, they'll encounter the mother and her young. However, since they've just fed on the villagers, the underground creatures won't attack the PCs unless the PCs threaten them. If any of them are threatened (which, in the mother's eyes, includes merely being approached), she will defend her young with special vigor (see her Special Attack, Ferocity, below).

- **Burrowing Biters (20):** See Creatures, below.
- **Biter Mother:** See Creatures, below.

Tunnel Fighting

The animals burrowed extensively throughout this area of the Windswept Wall. Each tunnel is about three feet in diameter. A Medium-sized character can fight in such a confined space with difficulty. Medium-sized PCs fighting in a tunnel suffer a -2 circumstance penalty to their attack and damage rolls with melee weapons, and a -2 circumstance penalty to ranged weapons. Large PCs suffer a -4 penalty. Small PCs do not suffer a penalty.

Treasure

The burrowing animals don't have any treasure themselves, but they might have burrowed their way to the crystal ball. They would not pay it any attention if they came across it. The ball might be casually discarded in a cavern similar to the ones the PCs found — but the PCs would have to find it first....

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

The adventure concludes when the PCs deal with the threat to future excavations by killing or driving off the mother. Mysteries persist, however. Sionaas, who has kept the real reason for the excavation secret, wants it to remain a secret. At the same time, it will occur to him that if the PCs help him locate the crystal ball, they might be convinced to retrieve objects for him from other planes. If the PCs have behaved in a trustworthy manner, Sionaas will make the offer. It's up to the PCs whether they have new adventures that start from the Windswept Wall.

But first, they must find the crystal ball. Exploring the network of tunnels — and facing the dangers therein — could provide many fine adventures.

CREATURES

Below apear the statistics for the creatures the PCs can encounter in this scenario.

Burrowing Biters

Burrowing biters strongly resemble rats (see Appendix I: Animals in the *Monster Manual*), except they have Tremorsense instead of Scent as a Special Quality and they burrow instead of climbing.

Burrowing Biters (20): CR 1/8; Tiny animal; HD 1/4 d8; hp 1; Init +2; Spd 15 ft., burrow 15 ft.; AC 14 (touch 14, flat-footed 12); Atk +4 melee (1d3–4, bite); Face/Reach 2 1/2 ft. x 2 1/2 ft./0 ft.; SQ Low-light vision, tremorsense; AL N; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +1; Str 2, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 2.

Skills and Feats: Balance +10, Climb +6, Hide +18, Move Silently +10; Weapon Finesse (bite).

Low-Light Vision: A burrowing biter can see twice as far as a human in starlight, moonlight, torchlight, and similar low-light conditions.

Tremorsense (Ex): A burrowing biter can automatically sense the location of anything within 60 feet that is in contact with the ground.

Skills: A burrowing biter receives a +4 racial bonus on Spot and Listen checks and a +8 racial bonus on Balance checks. It uses its Dexterity modifier for Climb checks.

Biter Mother

The biter mother resembles a boar (see Appendix I: Animals in the *Monster Manual*), except she has Tremorsense instead of Scent as a Special Quality and she can burrow at a speed of 30 .

Burrowing Biter Mother: CR 2; Medium-size animal; HD 3d8+9; hp 22; Init +0; Spd 40 ft., burrow 30

ft.; AC 16 (touch 10, flat-footed 16); Atk +4 melee (1d8+3, gore); SA Ferocity; SQ Low-light vision, tremorsense; AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref +3, Will +2; Str 15, Dex 10, Con 17, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 4.

Skills and Feats: Listen +7, Spot +5.

Ferocity (Ex): The bite mother defends her home and her young vigorously. She continues to fight without penalty even while disabled or dying (see Chapter 8: Combat in the *Player's Handbook*).

Low-Light Vision: A bite mother can see twice as far as a human in starlight, moonlight, torchlight, and similar low-light conditions.

Tremorsense (Ex): A bite mother can automatically sense the location of anything within 60 feet that is in contact with the ground.

Sionaas (EL 10)

Sionaas is a 10th-level wizard.

Sionaas: Male Human Wiz10; CR 10; Medium-size humanoid; HD 10d4+13; hp 46; Init +6; Spd 30 ft.; AC 15 (touch 13, flat-footed 13); Atk +5 melee (1d6, quarterstaff); Face/Reach 5 ft. x 5 ft./ ft.; AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref +7, Will +8; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 21, Wis 9, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Alchemy +18, Appraise +8, Concentration +14, Knowledge (arcana) +15, Knowledge (local) +18, Knowledge (planes) +18, Scry +18, Spellcraft +18; Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Craft Wand, Improved Initiative, Quicken Spell, Scribe Scroll, Spell Mastery (*darkvision, hold person, fireball, wall of stone, stone shape*), Toughness.

Wizard Spells Prepared: (4/6/5/4/4/3; base DC = 15 + spell level): 0 — *dancing lights, flare, light, mage hand*; 1st — *alarm, endure elements, grease, shield, Tenser's floating disk, unseen servant*; 2nd — *bull's strength, darkvision, knock, locate object, shatter*; 3rd — *fireball, fly, gust of wind, shrink item*; 4th — *dimension door, Leomund's secure shelter, locate creature, minor creation*; 5th — *prying eyes, stone shape, wall of stone.*

Spellbook: 0 — *arcane mark, dancing lights, daze, detect magic, detect poison, disrupt undead, flare, ghost sound, light, mage hand, mending, open/close*; 1st — *alarm, endure elements, grease, mage armor, Nystul's magical aura, Nystul's undetectable aura, shield, sleep, Tenser's floating disk, unseen servant*; 2nd — *bull's strength, darkvision, glitterdust, knock, locate object, obscure object, rope trick, shatter*; 3rd — *fireball, fly, gust of wind, hold person, Leomund's tiny hut, lightning bolt, shrink item*; 4th — *dimension door, Leomund's secure shelter, locate creature, minor creation, scrying*; 5th — *Leomund's secret chest, prying eyes, stone shape, wall of iron, wall of stone.*

Possessions: Bracers of armor +2, ring of protection +1, wand of lightning bolt (30 charges), *cloak of resistance +2, potion of cure moderate wounds.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eric Haddock is a game content writer for Xbox and PC games at Microsoft and publisher of Abashima Press <www.abashima.com>. He likes to pretend he has a life outside of gaming but his wife, also a gamer, makes that difficult — fortunately. He lives in the Seattle area with two cats who like the dice from games but don't play very much.